

Testimony before the Michigan House of Representatives

Education Committee

**Convening at 307 House Office Building
124 North Capitol, Lansing, Michigan
November 30, 2005**

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Good Morning. I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak with you and wish to thank you for your service in the Michigan House of Representatives to the people of Michigan and for your interest in strengthening education in Michigan by serving on the Education Committee. My name is Kelli Sweet. I have twenty years experience teaching secondary social science courses (US History, World Geography, World History, Criminal Law, Civics and Economics) in Birmingham, Royal Oak and Kalamazoo. I have taught affluent and at risk students. I have served as a curriculum director. I have taught twenty one years at the graduate and undergraduate levels at Nazareth College and Western Michigan University in the departments of Geography, History and Education teaching Social Studies, History and Geography Methods Courses- the how to teach content courses. I have consulted with over 100 districts and 15 intermediate school districts throughout the state. I served on the taskforce responsible for writing the Michigan Social Studies Curriculum Framework that was approved by the State Board of Education. Along with colleague Dr. Dahia Shabaka, Social Studies Curriculum Director for the Detroit Public Schools, I facilitated writing a draft of High School Course Content Expectations. That document is now undergoing a national review. I have worked in several capacities on the Social Studies MEAP as content, technical and bias reviewer. I have served on the NAEP Standard Setting Taskforce for Civics. As Executive Director, I speak for the Michigan Council for the Social Studies (MCSS), a voluntary professional organization of 3000 educators who teach kindergarten through the university level.

Horace Mann stated, *"In order that men may be prepared for self-government, their apprenticeship must commence in childhood. The great moral attribute of self-government cannot be born and matured in a day; and if school children are not trained to it, we only prepare ourselves for disappointment."* Mann was right. Schools are the only institution with the capacity and mandate to reach virtually every young person in Michigan. You are to be commended for your wisdom in passing PA 593 of 2004, stipulating that the social science subjects of World History, United States History, World Geography, Economics and American Government be included in the Michigan Merit Examination.

I am here today to urge you to support the recommended High School Graduation Requirements in Social Science of 1 credit in US History, 1 credit in World History and one-half credit each in Economics and Government/Civics. The concepts, facts and principles from these core social science subjects will provide young people with the foundation and skills they will need to be productive and responsible citizens in the 21st Century.

Learning economics, about the American free market system, will enable students to understand the challenges facing our state and national economies, and the global marketplace in which they will live as adults. An understanding and application of economic principles will help family finances and create a stronger citizenry. In this 21st Century, goods and services and ideas are exchanged across the globe in ways

that would have been impossible a generation ago. Students today need to understand the geography of world and the environment beyond their own backyard or community. A study of history provides students with knowledge crucial in today's world. Learning American History and World History allows young people to learn from the past when making informed decisions about the present. A study of government and civics helps young people understand the ideals of our democratic republic and to use knowledge of American government to make decisions about governing their community.

We need to act so that we can be sure that no matter where in Michigan students attend high school, they will have the knowledge they will need for efficacy. I currently represent social science, serving on the Michigan Department of Education's Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability Advisory Board. I serve on the High School Assessment Subcommittee that is currently investigating course exit exams to ensure that expectations for all students remain rigorous and that there is consistency of focus throughout classrooms in Michigan on what is taught in these required courses. Assessment is a tool that not only gives valuable information on what students have learned, but assessment also drives what teachers will teach. I am of the belief *we must assess for success*. The Michigan Curriculum Framework provides a worthy target for instruction in Michigan classrooms and grade level and course content expectations will further sharpen the focus. Requiring this core of social science subjects will ensure equity of opportunity for all Michigan students.

The events of today and the issues, with which you grapple daily as you perform your job serving your constituents, come from the core subjects of social science. In fact, *you do social science every day!* In the months to come, there will be debate over what to include. There seems to be agreement that reading, writing and mathematics are essential to an educational foundation, as you debate, please do not forget the original purpose of public education—that of the civic mission of the school. We do not want our students to be democratically illiterate. Social Science is the thread that holds our democracy together. I urge you to support the inclusion of 3 credits in these vital subjects- World History, US History, Economics and Government in the high school graduation requirements. Jefferson, one of the Framers, put it best when he said, *"I know of no safe depository of powers of society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education."*

Thank you for your attention and for your service for the common good.